

Principles and Key Components for High Quality National Service Literacy Programs*

The following outline provides a framework for the planning, implementation and evaluation of quality national service literacy programs. The outline is a supplement to another publication of the Corporation for National Service, "Principles of High Quality National Service Programs," and reflects the Corporation's current thinking about effective practices in national service programs addressing the literacy needs of young children. The document has been divided into two sections: principles, which provide general guidelines about the overall integration of literacy activities within national service programs; and key components, which outline the standards of quality tutoring activities.

Principles

- Quality national service literacy programs incorporate clear and measurable outcome objectives. These projects show how the activities of national service participants contribute to specific outcomes related to reading/literacy achievements for children, birth through third grade. Outcome objectives also address project expectations for community volunteers, schools and teachers, parents and the community at-large.
- Literacy volunteers are involved in service activities that play key roles in working with individual children, supporting classroom activities, supporting families, and serving as catalysts and organizers of community-level reading initiatives. Their activities provide a direct benefit to children that is valued by the school or community-based organization. Examples of such activities include: tutoring in the classroom; tutoring in after-school programs, extended day programs, school-age care centers; tutoring preschool children in Head Start, child care or other early childhood programs; reading with children at home or at school; helping with homework; coordinating others (e.g., volunteers) who provide a direct benefit to children; coordinating volunteer recruitment and placement; training tutors; coordinating parent involvement projects; organizing a book drive; or leveraging resources to build a reading room or to refurbish a school library or reading room. Activities that do not provide a direct benefit to children, such as curriculum development or research on reading, are only considered a literacy program if they are in support of activities that provide direct benefits.
- Quality literacy programs include activities and mechanisms that provide for the involvement of families, parents or guardians.
- Quality literacy programs incorporate intentional and appropriate adaptation of proven effective practices that address the specific needs of the child, the school and the community and that reflect the resources available to the program.
- Quality literacy programs comply with national, state and/or local regulations and standards regarding the care of a child. Many state and local governments regulate childcare standards by requiring accreditation and/or licensing. School districts have policies and procedures for involving students in enrichment activities. Volunteer tutor screenings and parental consent forms are often among the requirements to operate volunteer tutoring programs. Project staff ensure full compliance with all regulations

governing their programs. In addition, projects are strongly encouraged to adhere to nationally accepted standards for quality regarding the care of a child that are published by organizations such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the National School-Age Care Alliance.

Quality literacy programs apply principles of service-learning, an educational method:

- under which participants learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that is conducted in and addresses challenges facing a community;
- that recognizes the assets, strengths, and valuable experiences that service recipients as well as providers bring to a service relationship;
- that helps foster civic responsibility;
- that is coordinated with an elementary school, secondary school, institution of higher education, and/or community service program, and with the community;
- that enhances the academic curriculum of student participants, or the educational components of a community service program; and
- that provides structured time for the students and other participants to reflect on the service activity, both to enrich the experience for them and to improve the quality of service in the future.

In particular, quality literacy programs recognize: that tutors generally have much to learn, particularly from their tutees; that there are a wide variety of effective learning styles; that non-academic knowledge and experience can contribute to learning reading; that tutoring is a collaboration between the tutor and tutee, not a "pouring" of knowledge or skill from one vessel to another; that tutees' experience with (and view of) school authorities may be very different from that of the tutors; and that an effective learning relationship should take account of cultural differences, including concepts of self, community, and authority.

Key Components of Quality Tutoring Activities

National service literacy programs should consider the following key components when planning, implementing and evaluating quality tutoring activities:

1. Use of research-based elements to produce reading achievement. With a plethora of current research materials on the effectiveness of volunteer tutoring programs, project staff no longer have to start from scratch when designing and implementing tutoring activities. Staff are familiar with these resources and actively incorporate research-based elements through:
 - A demonstrated reading approach which effectively uses volunteers;
 - Appropriate and effective adaptation of the approach;
 - Consultation with trained reading specialists; and
 - Consultation of research resources throughout the planning, implementation and evaluation of the program.
2. Well-structured tutoring sessions in which the content and delivery of instruction are carefully planned. Some research suggests that structured tutorial programs result in greater academic achievement than unstructured programs. There is a wide range of successful

structured approaches ranging from homework assistance to specially designed lesson plans and materials. Quality tutoring programs should plan structured sessions to insure:

- Tutors are well prepared and equipped with a variety of tutoring strategies, materials and supplies;
 - Activities have consistency and continuity;
 - Instruction must be appropriate to the student's current performance level and should move the student forward from this level in a cumulative fashion; and
 - Sessions have room for flexibility to meet the individual needs of the student.
3. Close coordination with schools, school administration, the classroom and/or reading teacher, day care provider, pre-school, and/or Headstart center. There are significant advantages, both academically for the student and logistically for the program, in developing effective linkages between schools and the tutoring activities. Research evidence suggests that when tutoring is coordinated with good classroom reading practices, students perform better than when tutoring is unrelated to classroom instruction. Minimally, quality tutoring programs coordinate with schools in the following three ways:
- Establishment of a formal/contractual relationship with school administrators that recognizes their role as valuable stakeholders in planning, implementation and monitoring of the program;
 - Designation of a school liaison/contact person to facilitate on-going communication with the school and to assist in the application of regulations, policies and procedures related to implementation of the program; and
 - Access to school reading specialist(s) to help facilitate communication among tutors, students and teachers.
4. Intensive and on-going training and supervision for tutors can contribute significantly to the overall success of the program. The tutor training and supervision components of the program should encompass:
- Pre-service orientation that includes training sessions/information in reading curriculum and materials, principles of child development, classroom management/behavior management, learning disabilities and diversity issues;
 - School and program staff should provide an introduction and welcome to tutors, as well as an explanation of the needs and skills of the students;
 - On-going formal and informal in-service training opportunities;
 - On-going access to and supervision by a reading specialist/teacher and program staff; and
 - Specialized training and supervision for tutors who serve populations of children with severe reading difficulties. For example, tutors may need to become trained in early reading instruction or bilingual instruction to accommodate a child with severe reading difficulties.
5. Frequent and regular tutoring sessions. Some research suggests that in order to have an impact on achievement, there is an optimal frequency and duration of tutoring sessions. For instance, in one study, tutoring programs in which tutors met with tutees at least three times a week were more likely to generate positive achievement for tutees than programs in which tutors and tutees met twice a week. Rigorous evaluations of tutoring programs have also

reported positive results from programs in which tutoring sessions ran from 10 to 60 minutes in duration, and that longer sessions did not necessarily result in better outcomes. Quality tutoring programs incorporate age appropriateness of the session's duration, content and variety of activities.

6. Careful evaluation, assessment, monitoring and reinforcement of progress. The Corporation strongly believes that effective evaluation is essential to program success. In this context, evaluation should be viewed as a dynamic process which sets goals and objectives, applies lessons learned, and reports results. Programs look at themselves critically in order to continually improve quality. Evaluation of tutoring programs includes:
 - Academic pre- and post-testing of students according to the objectives set for the program;
 - Surveys completed by all program stakeholders (students, staff, parents, teachers, volunteers, etc.) on the strengths and weaknesses of the program;
 - Evaluation of additional factors which may show improvement as a result of the tutoring program such as school attendance, classroom behavior, grades, self-esteem, etc.;
 - A daily tutoring log which records the activities of the student and tutor during each session; and
 - Quality control measurements for program staff and management.
7. Access to training and technical assistance resources. In addition to having resources available for volunteer tutors, program staff also have access to on-going training and technical assistance opportunities for continuous quality improvement. National service programs have available a wide variety of training and technical assistance (T/TA) through the READSlist listserv and related websites, national service T/TA providers, local school systems, and institutions of higher education.
8. Engendering positive, caring relationships among students, staff and tutors. Some research has shown that the single most important factor contributing to the success of student enrichment programs is the positive, caring relationships among children and staff/tutors. Quality tutoring programs insure consistency in tutor/tutee pairs, so that students meet regularly with the same tutor. Adult staff and tutor volunteers are aware of the critical importance of building positive, caring relationships with students. Information on child development, discipline problems, and the needs of at-risk youth are built-in to the pre-service and ongoing training components. In many cases, the relationship developed between tutor and student may lead to a mentoring role - just as many mentoring programs may also involve tutoring. Tutoring programs present a unique opportunity for developing effective mentoring relationships by providing a common activity to foster the relationship and by offering tutor training components as ongoing support for mentors.

* This document was adapted from the Department of Education's publication, Evidence that Tutoring Works, written by Susan Thompson Hoffman (April 1997). References are omitted from this version of the document.